

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON DIVISION

MELISSA SANDERS, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

CIVIL ACTION NO. 2:12-cv-01562

ETHICON, INC., et al.,

Defendants.

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER
(Defendants' Motions for Summary Judgment)

Pending before the court is a Motion for Summary Judgment Based on the Statute of Limitations [ECF No. 56] and a Motion for Summary Judgment [ECF No. 77] both filed by defendants Ethicon, Inc. and Johnson & Johnson (collectively, "Ethicon"). As set forth below, Ethicon's Motion Based on the Statute of Limitations [ECF No. 56] is **DENIED** and Ethicon's Motion for Summary Judgment [ECF No. 77] is **GRANTED in part** and **DENIED in part**.

I. Background

This action involves Arkansas co-plaintiffs, one of whom was implanted with Gynecare Tension-free Vaginal Tape-SECUR ("TVT-S"), a mesh product manufactured by Ethicon, on August 8, 2008, at the University Hospital of Arkansas in Little Rock, Arkansas. Am. Short Form Compl. [ECF No. 17] ¶¶ 1–12. The case resides in one of seven MDLs assigned to the Honorable Joseph R. Goodwin by the

Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation concerning the use of transvaginal surgical mesh to treat pelvic organ prolapse (“POP”) and stress urinary incontinence (“SUI”). This individual case is one of a group of cases that the Clerk of the Court reassigned to me on November 22, 2016. [ECF No. 96]. In the seven MDLs, there are approximately 28,000 cases currently pending, approximately 17,000 of which are in the Ethicon MDL, MDL 2327.

Prior to the reassignment, in an effort to efficiently and effectively manage the massive Ethicon MDL, Judge Goodwin decided to conduct pretrial discovery and motions practice on an individualized basis so that once a case is trial-ready (that is, after the court has ruled on all summary judgment motions, among other things), the court can promptly transfer or remand the case to the appropriate district for trial. To this end, Judge Goodwin ordered the plaintiffs and defendants to submit a joint list of 200 of the oldest cases in the Ethicon MDL that name only Ethicon, Inc., Ethicon, LLC, and/or Johnson & Johnson. These cases became part of a “wave” of cases to be prepared for trial and, if necessary, remanded. *See* Pretrial Order No. 206, *In re Ethicon, Inc. Pelvic Repair Sys. Prods. Liab. Litig.*, No. 2:12-md-02327, Nov. 20, 2015, <http://www.wvsc.uscourts.gov/MDL/ethicon/orders.html>. The plaintiffs’ case was selected as an “Ethicon Wave 2 case.”

II. Legal Standards

A. Summary Judgment

To obtain summary judgment, the moving party must show that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to

judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(a). In considering a motion for summary judgment, the court will not “weigh the evidence and determine the truth of the matter.” *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 249 (1986). Instead, the court will draw any permissible inference from the underlying facts in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party. *Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp.*, 475 U.S. 574, 587–88 (1986).

Although the court will view all underlying facts and inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, the nonmoving party nonetheless must offer some “concrete evidence from which a reasonable juror could return a verdict” in his or her favor. *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 256. Summary judgment is appropriate when the nonmoving party has the burden of proof on an essential element of his or her case and does not make, after adequate time for discovery, a showing sufficient to establish that element. *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 322–23 (1986). The nonmoving party must satisfy this burden of proof by offering more than a mere “scintilla of evidence” in support of his or her position. *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 252. Likewise, conclusory allegations or unsupported speculation, without more, are insufficient to preclude the granting of a summary judgment motion. *See Dash v. Mayweather*, 731 F.3d 303, 311 (4th Cir. 2013); *Stone v. Liberty Mut. Ins. Co.*, 105 F.3d 188, 191 (4th Cir. 1997).

B. Choice of Law

The parties agree that Arkansas choice-of-law principles apply to this case and that these principles compel the application of Arkansas law to the plaintiffs’ claims.

Under 28 U.S.C. § 1407, this court has authority to rule on pretrial motions in MDL cases. The choice of law for these pretrial motions depends on whether they concern federal or state law:

When analyzing questions of federal law, the transferee court should apply the law of the circuit in which it is located. When considering questions of state law, however, the transferee court must apply the state law that would have applied to the individual cases had they not been transferred for consolidation.

In re Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Implants Prods. Liab. Litig., 97 F.3d 1050, 1055 (8th Cir. 1996) (citations omitted). To determine the applicable state law for a dispositive motion, the court generally refers to the choice-of-law rules of the jurisdiction where a plaintiff first filed her claim. *See In re Air Disaster at Ramstein Air Base, Ger.*, 81 F.3d 570, 576 (5th Cir. 1996) (“Where a transferee court presides over several diversity actions consolidated under the multidistrict rules, the choice of law rules of each jurisdiction in which the transferred actions were originally filed must be applied.”); *see also In re Air Crash Disaster Near Chi., Ill.*, 644 F.2d 594, 610 (7th Cir. 1981); *In re Digitek Prods. Liab. Litig.*, MDL No. 2:08-md-01968, 2010 WL 2102330, at *7 (S.D. W. Va. May 25, 2010).

If plaintiffs file their claim directly into the MDL in the Southern District of West Virginia, as the Sanders did in this case, I consult the choice-of-law rules of the state in which the plaintiff was implanted with the product. *See Sanchez v. Bos. Sci. Corp.*, No. 2:12-cv-05762, 2014 WL 202787, at *4 (S.D. W. Va. Jan 17, 2014) (“For cases that originate elsewhere and are directly filed into the MDL, I will follow the

better-reasoned authority that applies the choice-of-law rules of the originating jurisdiction, which in our case is the state in which the plaintiff was implanted with the product.”). Ms. Sanders underwent her implantation surgery in Arkansas. Am. Short Form Compl. [ECF No. 17] ¶ 11. Thus, the choice-of-law principles of Arkansas guide this court’s choice-of-law analysis.

In Arkansas, the choice-of-law analysis is guided by the *lex loci delicti* doctrine as well as “five choice-influencing factors.” *Ganey v. Kawasaki Motors Corp.*, 234 S.W.3d 838, 846–47 (Ark. 2006); *see also Schubert v. Target Stores, Inc.*, 201 S.W.3d 917, 922 (Ark. 2005). “Under the doctrine of *lex loci delicti*, the law of the place where the wrong took place is the proper choice of law.” *Ganey*, 234 S.W.3d at 846. However, rather than mechanically applying this doctrine, Arkansas courts also consider “(1) predictability of results, (2) maintenance of interstate and international order, (3) simplification of the judicial task, (4) advancement of the forum’s governmental interests, and (5) application of the better rule of law.” *Id.* In this case, these principles compel application of Arkansas law to the plaintiffs’ claims. The implantation surgery that allegedly resulted in Ms. Sanders’s injuries took place in Arkansas, where Ms. Sanders is a resident. Am. Short Form Compl. at 1–4 [ECF No. 16]. Thus, I apply Arkansas’s substantive law—including Arkansas’s statute of limitations—to this case.

III. Analysis

Ethicon argues it is entitled to summary judgment because the relevant statute of limitations bars the plaintiffs’ claims. Ethicon also argues it is entitled to

summary judgment because the plaintiffs' claim are without evidentiary or legal support.

A. Conceded Claims

The plaintiffs concede the following claims: Count II (Manufacturing Defect), Count IV (Strict Liability – Defective Product), Count VI (Common Law Fraud), Count VII (Fraudulent Concealment), Count VIII (Constructive Fraud), Count IX (Negligent Misrepresentation), Count X (Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress), Count XI (Breach of Express Warranty), Count XII (Breach of Implied Warranty), and Count XIII (Violation of Consumer Protection Laws). Accordingly, Ethicon's Motion regarding those claims is **GRANTED**.

B. All Remaining Claims

The court **FINDS** that genuine disputes of material fact exist regarding the plaintiffs' remaining claims challenged by Ethicon, including timeliness under the Arkansas statute of limitations. Accordingly, the plaintiffs' Motion as to all remaining claims is **DENIED**.

IV. Conclusion

For the reasons discussed above, it is **ORDERED** that Ethicon's Motion for Summary Judgment Based on the Statute of Limitations [ECF No. 56] is **DENIED**. It is further **ORDERED** that the Ethicon's Motion for Summary Judgment [ECF No. 77] is **GRANTED in part** and **DENIED in part**. Ethicon's Motion is **GRANTED** with regard to the following claims: Count II (Manufacturing Defect), Count IV (Strict Liability – Defective Product), Count VI (Common Law Fraud), Count VII

(Fraudulent Concealment), Count VIII (Constructive Fraud), Count IX (Negligent Misrepresentation), Count X (Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress), Count XI (Breach of Express Warranty), Count XII (Breach of Implied Warranty), and Count XIII (Violation of Consumer Protection Laws). Ethicon's Motion is **DENIED** in all other respects.

The court **DIRECTS** the Clerk to send a copy of this Order to counsel of record and any unrepresented party.

ENTER: December 12, 2017

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert C. Chambers', written over a horizontal line.

ROBERT C. CHAMBERS
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE